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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [SCUL](#) [CH](#) [JA](#)  
SUBJECT: NEW NANJING MASSACRE FILM DOES LITTLE TO CHANGE CHINESE  
PERCEPTIONS OF JAPAN

REF: A) 07 SHANGHAI 804; B) 08 SHANGHAI 276; C) 08 SHANGHAI 443; D) SHANGHAI 203

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The recent Chinese movie "Nanjing! Nanjing!" has stirred much domestic debate over the Nanjing Massacre and its implications for current Sino-Japan relations but has done little to alter public sentiments toward Japan. Comments on Chinese blogs are sharply divided between those who laud the movie's anti-war theme and those who accuse the Chinese director of "betraying" his own country. Interlocutors in Shanghai and Nanjing had mixed reactions, some dismissing it as just another movie among many in the same genre, while others expressed hope that the movie's unique angle would generate open discussion of historical issues. Japanese diplomats in Shanghai said the movie is not being shown in Japan because Japanese theaters fear a right-wing backlash. A private viewing of the movie for Japanese residents in Shanghai received positive local media coverage. Historical issues are unlikely to derail Sino-Japan relations from its current positive track, said our contacts, as the Chinese Government looks to focus on the future. Although the Japanese Government has done little to compensate Chinese victims of Japanese atrocities during WWII, the Chinese Government, too, has neglected to care for its victims, particularly "comfort women" who, featured prominently in the film and currently in their 80s and 90s, are dying off quickly in obscurity, said one scholar. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The movie "Nanjing! Nanjing!" (English title: "City of Life and Death") was released in theaters throughout China on April 22 and quickly captured national attention, with ticket sales reaching USD 17.6 million in its first 10 days, a huge success by Chinese standards. The movie (still showing in some theaters over a month after its opening) was partially funded by the Jiangsu Radio & Television Bureau (a local government agency in Jiangsu Province), and was directed by Lu Chuan, a 38 year old Chinese who was relatively unknown prior to this film. Lu, a Beijing native, had studied at a military academy in Nanjing

before entering the film industry. Although the movie was released at the same time as a German film about the Nanjing Massacre, "Rabe's Diary," recounting the efforts by the German national John Rabe to protect refugees in Nanjing, "Nanjing! Nanjing!" received more attention from the Chinese media and public because of its unique angle, showing the occupation of Nanjing by the Japanese military through the eyes of a Japanese soldier, sparking much debate in Chinese media and blogs over the movie's "humanizing" of the Japanese military. Poloff spoke with a range of interlocutors, including scholars, students, and Japanese officials in Shanghai and Nanjing in May, about their perceptions of the movie and importance of historical issues in modern Sino-Japan relations.

#### Netizens Divided

13. (C) There was a flurry of debate on Chinese blogs in the opening days of the movie and continuing well into May, with opinion sharply divided between those supporting the film's purported anti-war message and those criticizing what they perceive as the film's sympathetic view towards Japanese soldiers. According to media reports, the director Lu Chuan even received death threats accusing him of "betraying" his own country. One Chinese blogger wrote, "300,000 Nanjing souls will not forgive you, you modern Chinese traitor, for covering up the Nanjing Massacre for the Japanese!" Some bloggers expressed their anger towards Japan with comments like "Hope that I or my son, grandson can stand on the ruins of Tokyo in memorial of the tens of millions of Chinese souls that perished" and "One cannot watch it (the movie) without having extreme hatred towards the Japanese." Other bloggers, however, advised Chinese viewers to be "more rational," "objective," and to not let rampant

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nationalism "blind them." One blogger wrote, "I feel that present-day Japanese should not bear responsibility (for these atrocities)." Several bloggers commented that the Chinese have also "destroyed themselves" through the Cultural Revolution and Great Leap Forward.

#### Nanjing Students: Film Spurs Debate, But Will Change Little

14. (C) Poloff spoke with over 20 undergraduate and graduate students from Nanjing University's Department of International Relations (IR) and Department of History in two separate roundtables about "Nanjing! Nanjing!" and overall Sino-Japan relations. Although they all had heard of the movie and read much about it on blogs, many had not seen the film. When asked why they had not seen it, the students said that the graphic images would be difficult to watch (some said they started but could not finish watching it) and that they had already seen several other movies on the same subject. While some of the students thought the film was interesting because "Japanese soldiers are not portrayed like devils as in prior films," many viewed the movie as just one among many in the same genre. (Comment: Poloffs who saw "Nanjing! Nanjing!" believe the film portrays only one Japanese soldier, the main character, in a relatively positive light. End comment.) One student from the History Department whose family is originally from Nanjing said she "does not need to learn about history from a movie" since her family actually experienced the tragedy. One student criticized the director for trying to convey "too many messages," but others lauded the movie for its anti-war theme and for "showing the truth" about human struggle.

15. (C) When asked about the movie's impact on Chinese perceptions of Japan, some students expressed hope for open discussion between Japan and China of historical issues, but added that the movie may "make people think about history, but will not change any minds." "Japanese politicians should look at history more objectively," said one student. Regarding current Sino-Japan relations, students from the IR Department questioned the purpose of the US-Japan alliance and Japan's

intentions towards China. "Japan views relations with China as a zero-sum game," especially in their competition for natural resources, said one student. Other students asked rhetorically, "Is the US-Japan alliance an anti-China alliance?" and "Is the US-Japan alliance a negotiating tool for US-China relations?"

#### Private Nanjing Massacre Museum

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16. (C) Nanjing has two museums dedicated to the Nanjing Massacre. One of them, "The Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders" is a large publicly funded museum, newly reopened in December 2007 to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre. (Note: See Ref A for more on Poloff's visit to this museum. End note.) On May 15, Poloff visited the other less well-known, private museum, called the "Nanjing Civilian Anti-Japanese War Museum," which is much smaller and lies in a suburb of Nanjing. The museum is owned and financed solely by a local entrepreneur, Wu Xianbing, a 43 year old native of Nanjing whose full-time job is president of a local interior decoration company. The museum, opened two years ago free of charge to the public, houses photos, narratives of victims, and personal artifacts of victims and Japanese soldiers, mostly purchased over the Internet or in Japan by Wu, who invested a total of RMB 5 million (USD 730,000) of his personal money. Wu's museum also has on display the original VHS recordings of Iris Chang's interviews with Nanjing Massacre victims. (Note: Iris Chang was the Chinese-American author of the 1997 U.S. bestseller "Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II." End note.) The tapes were donated to the museum by Chang's parents shortly after her death in 2004, according to Wu.

17. (C) Asked why he decided to build this museum using his own  
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money, Wu said that his family was not directly affected by the Nanjing Massacre, but he had built the museum out of his own "personal interest" in history. According to Wu, his museum is one of only two private museums on the Nanjing Massacre in China (the other one is in Sichuan). Wu also served as a "historical consultant" to "Nanjing! Nanjing!," which he described as "only a movie" that may help people learn more about history but will have limited long-term influence. The museum curator Mr. Zhang told Poloff that the museum receives many tour groups and students, including from the United States and Japan. The museum also serves as a venue for conferences with Chinese and Japanese scholars. Poloff noticed hundreds of signatures and messages from visitors, mostly students from China, Japan, and the United States, on the walls leading up to the museum entrance. Most of the messages expressed condolences to the victims. Some of the Japanese names, however, had been crossed out by Chinese students who had become angry after touring the museum, according to Zhang.

#### East China Scholars: No Change in Perception, Policy

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18. (C) East China scholars do not think the historical issues between China and Japan will be resolved anytime soon. Wang Wenjiang, Research Fellow at Shanghai Jiaotong University, was positive about "Nanjing! Nanjing!," saying that previous films about the Nanjing Massacre had given the impression of indiscriminate atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers, making Chinese audiences feel "indignant" and "humiliated." "Nanjing! Nanjing!," however, tried to show that some Japanese soldiers actually had a human side. The purpose of the movie is not to stir up nationalism or anti-Japanese feelings, said Wang, and the movie may provide an opportunity to examine this period of history more closely. However, anti-Japanese nationalism is a "fact of life" in China, and debate over movies like this may only be the "first step" in a long and gradual process of changing people's minds, said Wang.

19. (C) "Nanjing! Nanjing!" might have influenced public

perceptions of Sino-Japan relations if it had been released while Junichiro Koizumi was Japan's prime minister, since his frequent visits to Yasukuni Shrine made historical issues more sensitive at the time, said Li Xiushi, Director of the Center for Japan Studies at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS). Now, movies like this have little impact, continued Li, as Sino-Japan relations have stabilized and most Chinese youth now focus increasingly on present-day Japan - its fashion, music, TV shows, and animation. Hua Tao, Professor at the Johns-Hopkins Center for Chinese and American Studies at Nanjing University, thinks that Chinese views toward history will not change through movies, books, or academic discussions. There is currently "no real opportunity" for the Chinese public to significantly change its view of Japan or Sino-Japanese history, he said, although there is increasingly a generational gap in feelings toward Japan. Jing Shenghong, Professor of History at Nanjing Normal University, agreed during a separate discussion that the feelings of Nanjing residents towards Japan are generally improving, but there exists a gap between the younger generation, which is too preoccupied with finding jobs to "care as much" about historical issues, and older residents who still get angry when discussing this subject.

#### Japanese Consulate "Monitoring" Anti-Japanese Sentiment

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¶10. (C) Officials at the Japanese Consulate in Shanghai said there are only 500 Japanese residents in Nanjing (as opposed to 50,000 in nearby Shanghai) since most Japanese are still afraid to go there. Megumi Otsuka and Kotatsu Nishino, two political Vice Consuls at the Japanese Consulate, told Poloff that most of their work involves Nanjing-related issues, including "monitoring" anti-Japanese sentiment and activities in Nanjing and other areas of East China. Such "monitoring" became particularly critical, they said, after the mass anti-Japanese demonstrations that took place throughout China in 2005. Although a repeat of that is unlikely now, they believe, historical issues remain "very sensitive" for many Chinese.

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¶11. (C) Regarding "Nanjing! Nanjing!", Otsuka and Nishino said there was much positive reaction among younger Chinese when the movie was first released, but older Chinese viewers were quite negative, some former victims of the Nanjing Massacre claiming that "no Japanese were like that" (i.e., like the main character in the movie, a young Japanese soldier, who saves two Chinese prisoners in the end). From the middle of May, however, our Japanese interlocutors began seeing more negative articles in state-run newspapers, such as Wenhui and Jiefang Daily, criticizing the movie and director for being "pro-Japanese" and for "humanizing" Japanese soldiers too much. (Note: Su Zhiliang, Professor of History at Shanghai Normal University, also told Poloff during a separate discussion that he saw commentators on Chinese television in late May harshly criticizing the movie. End note.) Our Japanese interlocutors said they were surprised by the timing of these articles, since the Chinese Government had placed this movie on its list of 10 best movies of the year just a few weeks prior, but could only speculate that perhaps the Chinese Government wanted to "balance" some of the earlier positive Chinese media coverage of the movie.

#### Japanese Diplomats: Japanese Public "Not Ready" To See Film

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¶12. (C) "Nanjing! Nanjing!," like "Rabe's Diary" and most other Nanjing-related films in the past, is not being shown in Japan, said Nishino, because film distributors and theaters are afraid of right-wing activists stirring up trouble in theaters. Nishino said there was an incident in Japan several years ago when activists barged into a movie theater showing a Nanjing-related film and slashed the movie screen. Besides such threats, the Japanese public is "not yet ready to face" the graphic images of atrocities committed by its ancestors, said Otsuka. Japanese students all learn about WWII in school, and everyone in Japan knows generally what happened in Nanjing, she

continued, but no one in Japan wants to discuss these historical issues. A group of Japanese exchange students in Shanghai, however, organized a special showing of "Nanjing! Nanjing!" for Japanese residents of Shanghai on May 23. The special showing was attended by 250 Japanese students, businesspeople, and Chinese wives of Japanese businessmen in Shanghai. The film's director, Lu Chuan, also made a special appearance at this event, which received positive local media coverage, and engaged with the Japanese audience in a Q&A session. When asked by one Japanese student why he made this film, Lu responded that he wanted to make an anti-war movie showing that all sides suffer in war, and that war changes human nature. He also expressed his hope that the Japanese would eventually apologize for these historical events and that the movie would be shown in Japan. Otsuka believes a showing in Japan, though difficult, would be a step in the right direction since "it is important to change Chinese perceptions, but it is even more important to change Japanese perceptions" of history.

#### Comfort Women: The Forgotten Victims

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¶13. (C) "Comfort women" feature prominently in "Nanjing! Nanjing!," with some critics of the movie, including several students Poloff spoke to in Nanjing, saying that the movie focuses too much on this issue. Su Zhiliang of Shanghai Normal University, who described himself as one of only two "experts" in East China on the issue of comfort women, estimates there are 40 known comfort women survivors in China. Most are in Hainan (over 10) and Shanxi Province (13), and the rest are scattered throughout China: Beijing (1), Hunan (1), Hubei (4), Heilongjiang, Jilin, Zhejiang (1), Guangxi (2), etc. He used to know of 5 survivors in Shanghai, but 4 died shortly after 2000, and the last one passed away just a few months ago. There may be other survivors, said Su, but most choose to live in obscurity, pressured by their children and grandchildren to conceal their identity to avoid being stigmatized.

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¶14. (C) Most young Chinese have mixed feelings towards Japan, said Su, fascinated by Japanese pop culture but still very angry about historical issues. However, very few students want to pursue research on historical issues, especially the comfort women, lamented Su, as students now focus more on practical subjects. Many students also do not want to research this topic because it requires much field work at one's own expense (the government and university will often decline requests for funding), requires Japanese language ability, and is an emotionally painful topic. The Chinese Government is increasingly focused on the future, as it looks to cooperate with Japan on economic and other issues. The Chinese Government, consequently, has paid less attention to Sino-Japanese history in recent years, and the victims of the Japanese occupation, such as former comfort women, are being "forgotten," said Su. There is no government support for the survivors' livelihood, according to Su. They are "entirely dependent" on private donations, much of it from overseas Chinese in the United States. There are currently 50-60 former "comfort women stations" in Shanghai, all now converted into private homes but still marked with old signs. Su said he had asked the Shanghai Government many times to convert some of these sites into small museums, but the government had refused, telling him they have "too many other things to worry about." As most of the remaining survivors enter their 80s and 90s, Su is afraid that this tragic chapter in history will "get lost."

#### Comment

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¶15. (C) East China scholars believe the Sino-Japan relationship will continue on its current positive course, as the Chinese Government focuses on the future rather than the past. Overt anti-Japanese sentiment among the general public also appears to be waning in East China, but anecdotal evidence suggests much

anti-Japanese sentiment still exists beneath the surface. In one telling example, Poloff overheard two Chinese men who work for Panasonic (they were wearing company badges) eating Japanese food in a Japanese restaurant while venting their dislike for Japan throughout the entire lunch. This is not hypocritical, said some local Chinese whom Poloff spoke to afterwards. It reflects the pragmatism of most Chinese, who have no qualms about working for Japanese companies (and learning the Japanese language) even if they personally do not like Japan. The Chinese Government, too, is very pragmatic when it comes to Sino-Japan relations, said several interlocutors, focusing for the most part on positive cooperation, but not loath to stir up anti-Japanese sentiment when it suits their interest.

SCHUCHAT